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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 001230

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PINR](#) [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [GT](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT REPLACES SENIOR POLICE LEADERS

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen G. McFarland for reasons 1.4 (b&d).

¶1. (U) On September 21, President Colom and Minister of Government Jimenez announced changes in the senior leadership of the National Civilian Police (PNC). Marlene Raquel Blanco Lapola, the first woman to ever lead the PNC, replaced Isabel Mendoza as the Director of the National Civilian Police (PNC), and Rember Aroldo Larios Tobar replaced Henry Lopez as Deputy Director. Colom and Jimenez publicly attributed the changes to long-term plans to strengthen the PNC as an institution, intimating that the changes were not due to either officer's performance in office. However, Jimenez made clear that, should any accusations against either officer arise, they would be investigated.

¶2. (C) President Colom privately told the Ambassador that Mendoza had been ineffective as PNC Director, and that he shared the Embassy's concern that Lopez had close ties to organized crime. The Ambassador had previously told Colom that Embassy law enforcement offices were frustrated at having to work with corrupt senior police leaders. The Embassy vetted Blanco.

¶3. (SBU) On September 23, Blanco announced the removal of 17 senior police officers from their positions, saying that each had completed at least 20 years in the PNC and that the time had come for them to make way for a new generation of officers. In fact, many of these officers were believed to have been negligent, corrupt, or worse. Press reported the Ambassador's support for these changes. Additionally, Blanco announced that Jesus Esquivel, Commander of Guatemala City's 13th Precinct, had been relieved of duty due to a series of homicides and robberies committed by officers under his supervision.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador used his introductory call on Minister of Government Francisco Jimenez to urge the GOG to replace corrupt officers. Jimenez was reluctant to do so. In subsequent meetings with President Colom, Colom told the Ambassador that he had derogatory information on former PNC Deputy Director Henry Lopez, and was poised to replace him and indict him. The Ambassador said that the USG also had information that tied Lopez to criminal groups, and urged the President to get rid of him and other corrupt senior police officers.

¶5. (C) Biographic note: PNC Director Blanco previously served as head of the PNC Office for Attention to Victims, was Personnel Director for the Directorate for Criminal Investigations (DINC), and Deputy Director of the Crime Prevention Unit. She has been a member of the PNC for 22 years, and is the sister of Orlando Blanco, who is the GOG's Secretary for Peace and an important human rights leader. In its dealings with her, NAS has found Blanco to be sharp and forthcoming, but notes that she has little management experience. Larios served as the PNC's Inspector General, but according to NAS contacts he conducted few investigations

during his tenure. Prior to the formation of the current PNC, Larios served as head of the Criminal Investigative Department of the defunct National Police until 1991. He reportedly spent time in self-imposed exile in Canada after publishing a controversial report on the murder of anthropologist Myrna Mack (sister of respected human rights activist Helen Mack), and considers himself a friend of the United States. Embassy vetting revealed no significant derogatory information for either officer.

¶6. (C) Comment. Former PNC Director Mendoza was ineffective, and his deputy, Henry Lopez, was credibly alleged to be involved in organized crime. We do not know how these new officers will perform, but have no doubt that they will be an improvement over their predecessors.

McFarland